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SUBJECT: POLICE REFORM AND CORRUPTION IN ARGENTINA'S BUENOS
AIRES PROVINCE

11. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met with Federal Prosecutor Dr. Carlos Stornelli, who will likely be the next Minister of Security for the Province of Buenos Aires following October 28 elections. His first priority and greatest challenge will be the institutional and cultural reform of the notoriously corrupt provincial police force and the need for modernizing the police structure. He also talked of rebuilding the people's trust in police, rebuilding trust between the police and the political leadership, and "taking back the street." He said the government was too permissive on some security issues, including on drug use. Stornelli also stated that corruption in Argentina, while perhaps not practiced by as many public officials as in the 1990s, is a bigger problem and more concentrated in fewer hands. Ambassador noted Embassy agencies' close cooperation with federal and provincial security forces and with the judicial sector and offered USG assistance in training and possible exchanges and visits on security-related issues. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Federal Prosecutor Dr. Carlos Stornelli called on the Ambassador October 11 to discuss security issues in Buenos Aires Province. Stornelli has been tapped by favored gubernatorial candidate (and current Vice President) Daniel Scioli to be his Security Minister. Stornelli told the Ambassador he "would have a lot to do" if Scioli wins and he is appointed Minister. He said his most difficult job will be the reform -- institutional and cultural -- of the BA provincial police, a notoriously corrupt institution. It is a long-standing and multi-layered problem that will not be fixed overnight.

REBUILDING TRUST

13. (U) A top priority will be trying to restore public confidence in the police and police confidence in the political leadership. Stornelli said his top priority will be to restore a sense of public security by returning the police to the streets. Stornelli explained that the police are an "armed group" that does not know its mission. This is the fault of the political leadership. The problem goes back 30 years, he explained. First, there were leftist guerrilla attacks on street patrolmen, then the period of military dictatorship and security force repression. This was followed by the return of democracy in 1983 and the long reconciliation process of trying to account for the numerous human rights abuses of Argentina's security forces, including by the BA provincial police.

14. (U) After the military government's repression, Stornelli

explained that the political pendulum swung the other way, initiating a much more liberal attitude toward criminal prosecution and imprisonment. He said this included an excessively permissive attitude toward drug use in Argentina.

The police began "ceding the streets," i.e. not forcefully going after criminals for fear of being accused of abuse. He explained that police were afraid to do their jobs for fear of becoming ensnared in bureaucratic and legal proceedings. Coupled with Argentina's inefficient and ineffective judicial system that routinely bounces offenders back to the streets and with the police's poor pay and training, police see little incentive to do their jobs. Stornelli stated that it made little sense having the police on the street without a clear mission.

BUDGET AND MODERNIZATION

15. (SBU) Stornelli said he would work to get the necessary budget for proper training and modernizing of the force. He noted that in Buenos Aires province the police bureaus do not communicate with each other, citing as an example the lack of contact between the Criminal Investigations and Criminal Prevention bureaus. He also noted little effective communication with prosecutors, responsible along with judges for directing investigations. Although he said the current administrative structure was too decentralized with six subsecretaries, Stornelli said he did not plan to make significant organizational changes initially.

16. (U) The Ambassador noted Embassy agencies' close and positive cooperation with Argentine federal and provincial security forces and expressed our willingness to work with the new provincial administration on these issues through training, exchanges, visits, and facilitating contacts with U.S. state and municipal law enforcement agencies

CORRUPTION ALIVE AND WELL

17. (SBU) Stornelli has worked on major public corruption cases in Argentina since the early 1990s. He led investigations against former President Menem, and is currently working on the Skanska gas pipeline corruption investigation. Corruption, according to Stornelli, remains a very serious concern in Argentina. He said that corruption was perhaps not as pervasive as in the 1990s (Argentina's supposed golden era of corruption), i.e., not as many officials were involved, but added that corruption today was just as bad, if not worse, and concentrated in fewer hands. Corruption, he said, was part of the culture and will be very difficult to address. He noted that, personally, he sometimes had to work hard to overcome his discouragement over the persistence of the problems, but said there exists a core of individuals dedicated to improving the situation.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Provincial gubernatorial candidate Scioli has stressed to the Embassy (and in his public campaign) his high interest in improving security in the Buenos Aires province. Stornelli, with his background as a prosecutor, knows the issues well, seems to understand the enormity of his job, and appears realistic about what he can accomplish. If appointed Security Minister, Embassy believes Stornelli promises to be a positive and effective interlocutor on security issues in Argentina's most populous and important province. We will look to target programs and training the forces whose leadership he will assume to our mutual interests. Stornelli expressed interest in a possible early visit to the U.S. to learn from U.S. experiences.

WAYNE